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ABSTRACT

College faculty who teach writing courses might find an examination of early religious literature helpful when trying to explain "writing for an audience" or "audience awareness" to their students. The Jesuit priest who preached to and wrote for the Indians in Brazil during the early colonial period, Jose de Anchieta, is a model of a writer who always kept his audience firmly in mind. In his plays ("autos"), Anchieta used various strategies to convert the Indians and to keep the Portuguese colonists on the straight and narrow path to heaven. Anchieta's "autos" seem to include something for everyone and contain all the popular culture forms--farce, music, dance, poetic recitation, and most of all, pure spectacle. The plays were usually written in three languages, Portuguese, Castilian Spanish, and Tupi (the language of the Indians). Anchieta wanted both to amuse and instruct his diverse audience. He incorporated elements of the Indians' usual ceremonial practices into Portuguese farce and used a fluent and natural language, replete with references to Brazilian settings, animals and birds, and historical occurrences. Anchieta's "autos" were very different in style from the sermons of the early New England preachers who also wrote for a specific audience, but who preached for the already converted and whose sermons were exclusionary as far as the North American Indians were concerned. (Twenty-two notes are included.) (NKA)

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The "Autos" of José de Anchieta

Nola Kortner Aiex

For the last decade the annual 4 C's conferences (the Conference on College Composition and Communication, for those of you who wish a translation) have been much preoccupied with two topics, the process approach to writing and with writing for an audience. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive or antagonistic topics, of course.

In my capacity as acquisitions coordinator for the branch of the ERIC Clearinghouse which deals with English and Communication Skills, I pore over many conference programs and examine many papers and articles which treat the question of audience awareness in composition, and especially how to teach college freshmen to write for a specific audience, whether it be their own peers in their classroom writing group, their penpals on the computer E-mail network, ot their secret selves in their daily journals. Anything, it seems, to deflect them from writing for the instructor who will edit their grammar and spelling unmercifully and grade them for what they have written.

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While trying to decide whether or not to put these conference papers on writing for an audience into the ERIC database, I have often thought that it is too bad that the college faculty members

who teach writing cannot offer José de Anchieta's "autos" as a model of how to write for a specific audience. Anchieta's religious dramas are perfect examples of writing for a particular audience, with a specific purpose in mind, and in addition, writing in as entertaining a manner as possible while trying to accomplish his objective--converting the Indians. The early North American religious writers were also very adept at their writing, but their tracts and sermons are dour and scholarly. Anchieta, on the other hand, was as manipulative as any Stephen Spielberg or Stephen King of today.

José de Anchieta, born in the Canary Islands in 1534, studied at Coimbra and entered the Jesuits at 17. Two years later he was part of the Jesuit mission which accompanied the Portuguese secular authorities to Brazil. Biographical materials affirm that he dedicated himself to intense proselytizing in the New World and that six months after his arrival in Brazil, the then 20-year-old had learned the language of the Indians and written "Arte de Grammática da Lingua Mais Usada na Costa do Brasil." This was to help his fellow Jesuits convert the Indians and educate them in the ways of the Church. (1)

The role of the Jesuits in Brazil has been much discussed pro and con by historians, but there is general agreement that the cultural activities of the soldiers of Ignatius Loyola had two well defined objectives: the conversion of the Indians into socially useful children of God and keeping a watchful eye on the

activities of the colonists, who were usually adventurers interested principally in exploiting the Indians and profiting from the riches of the new country. (2)

According to Anchieta's letter "Informação do Brasil e de Suas Capitanias" (1584), the Indians

> ordinàriamente andam nus, ainda que os carijós alguns dali para avante, usam de peles de veados e outros animais que matam e comem... Todos os da costa que tem uma mesma lingua comem carne humana, posto que alguns em particular nunca comeram e tem grandíssimo nojo dela. Casamentos de ordinário não celebram entre si e assim tem tres ou quatro mulheres,... se é grande principal e valente, tem dez, doze, e vinte... São muito dados ao vinho... Nenhuma criatura adoram por Deus, sòmente os trovões cuidam que são Deus, mas nem por isso lhes fazem honra alguma.... (3)

Anchieta goes on to reason that if the Indians can be convinced to experience fear of God and subjugate themselves to Him, then the impediments to their salvation and their bad habits would be very easy to get rid of, especially if they could have "teachers in residence with them, inciting them to persevere, attend Mass, and confess their sins." (4) Anchieta wrote that the biggest

impediment to the Indians way on the right path was the dissolute Portuguese who had no zeal for the Indians' salvation, especially the Portuguese who had slaves and who made slaves of the Indians, those who did not themselves attend Mass, and those who lived with women who were not their wives. (5)

Of course, Anchieta wrote the "Cartas" in 1584, or thirty years after he first landed in Brazil, and as one literary historian has noted, it reads like an attempt to synthesize the principal happenings of his initial decades in Brazil, not only those relating to missionary activities but to other aspects of culture as well. (6)

The early preachers of New England were just as singleminded as Anchieta was (however, they considered the Jesuits in Canada their mortal enemies). On some crossings from England to North America there were as many as three sermons preached a day. The Puritans envisioned a colony with two classes of preachers: a "pastor" to comfort and exhort a congregation and a "teacher" to emphasize doctrinal issues. (7) Although there seems to be overwhelming evidence that sermons were popular with the early colonists nevertheless

> in 1635 the General Court of Massachusetts ruled that no dwelling could be more than half a mile from the meeting house and that magistrates could censure nonattendance at church. Similarly, although

> only professed believers could be church members, the governors of the colonies of Massachusetts, New Haven, and Connecticut, to guarantee the conversion of the wayward and thereby fulfill the evangelical responsibility of the church, passed laws in the 1640s requiring every resident of a town to attend the preaching of the word. (8)

The early New England sermons followed a specific organizational plan. They always begin with a specific Biblical text and then progress to an explanation of that text, a derivation of a doctrine from the text, and an enumeration and development of reasons for and uses of that doctrine. (9) Those preachers also had their audience firmly in mind. It was, however, for the most part, preaching to the already converted. The sermons are in plain style, well argued, with considerable use of allegory, meaning, in this case, many rhetorical devices that the preachers considered suitable for a popular audience:

> homely comparisons, parablelike illustrations, dialogs of the simple listener and the wise pastor, and stories about the honorable saint and the despicable hypocrite. The liveliest and most imaginative passages result from what the ministers termed a 'similitude': a comparison or analogy, generally concrete, drawn from one kind of experience that makes clear a concept or idea

of a totally dissimilar experience. (10)

Garry Wills, in discussing political rhetoric in his new book, "Under God: Religion and American Politics," says

> Preachers need devils. The sinner needs to be rescued from the threat of an evil that breathes down on him. A crisis is always at hand. This aspect of our political language is derived from the jeremiads of New England meeting times. The jeremiad, like the diatribe of classical rhetoric, was less a genre of oratory than a style of thought... As the name would indicate, the preacher denounced like an ancient prophet the people's defection that can free God from honoring his promises in the contract... The form itself is denunciatory, and it reflects an original theory of grace more than the actual loss of grace. Since God's saving grace cannot be merited in Calvinist theology, all the soul can de is prepare itself for grace by lamenting its own insufficiency. (11)

The early New England settlers believed that the showdown between God and the devil would take place in the New World. And they considered the Indians to be in the service of the devil. Wills writes: "The devil had recruited the Indians in a clever countermove to thwart in the New World what he could not stop in Europe--the progress of learning and the Reformation." (12)

Such an attitude almost precludes proselytizing the Indians, and Wills quotes Cotton Mather who, when entire Indian villages were wiped out by a plague in 1611-12, said "the woods were almost cleaned of those pernicious creatures, to make room for a better growth." (13)

The "autos" of Jose de Anchieta, on the other hand, are the opposite of the exclusionary sermons of New England. Anchieta's plays seem to include something for just about everyone and contain all the forms of popular culture. They are a mixture of Portuguese farce (rooted in Medieval allegorical drama and indebted to Gil Vicente), music and dance, poetic recitation, and most of all, pure spectacle. (14) Anchieta included elements, usually in three languages--Portuguese, Tupi, and Castilian--to amuse and instruct, or better, to instruct while amusing, his diverse audience. Anchieta's "autos" also included a high level of participation of the audience members in the actual production. It was participatory theater in the real sense. José Guilherme Merquior noted that the plays "eram representados em dias santos com a participação ativa de catequitas, colonos, e catecúmenos." (15) Another modern commentator has categorized the "autos" perfectly as "teatro de revista indigena."

Although the language of the "autos" is characteristically simple and down-to-earth, the presence onstage of angels, the devil, saints who save a town's inhabitants from disaster, historical characters, along with ordinary people, all interacting together, mark these plays as allegories. All of this mixture of characters (especially the often comic devils),

along with the fluency and naturalness of the language employed (what one critic calls "the lilting verse of the medieval redondilha") (16), and the support of the music and dancing, confers a charm and vivacity to the "autos" that is extremely rare in didactic literature.

In adapting the "farsa portuguesa" to the New World, Anchieta incorporated elements of the Indians' usual ceremonial practices, material and language that emphasized the Brazilian locales, and the music and dance that the Indians performed so easily. Even a superficial reading of the "autos" reveals a true love of the Brazilian natural environment on Anchieta's part. This all came from a writer who was not naturally a man of the theater.

According to historians, Anchieta wrote his first "auto," "A Pregação Universal," on the orders of Manuel da Nóbrega, to celebrate the expulsion of French forces from Villegaignon in Espirito Santo and the transference of the capital to São Paulo in 1561. The title is an indication of Anchieta's attention to his audience--"pregação universal" because it was designed for both the Indian and the Portuguese settler and written partly in Tupi, partly in Portuguese for the humbler immigrants, and partly in Spanish for the better educated Portuguese who used Spanish during the time of Philip II's reign. (17)

"Na Festa de São Lourenço" is generally considered to be José de Anchieta's best play. The characters are Guaixara, the chief of the devils; his two servants, Aimbiré and Saravaia; the allegorical Amor de Deus and Temor de Deus; Decio, the Roman emperor who killed St. Lawrence; Valeriano, Decio's colleague;

St. Sebastian, the patron saint of Rio de Janeiro; St. Lawrence, patron saint of the village in which the play was presented (today Niteroi); various guardian angels; an old woman who shelters the devils; some captives of the devils; and young boys who sing and dance. Female parts were probably taken by men, since women were prohibited from appearing on stage, as in Elizabethan England.

The play begins with Temor de Deus and Amor de Deus addressing the audience in Spanish. The second act, in Tupi, shows the three devils planning the temptation of the Indian inhabitants. The litany of the excesses of the Indians (which the devils recite) includes dancing, drinking, smoking, exorcism, killing, cannibalism, enslavement of captive Indians, adultery, cohabitation, dishonesty, spying, corruption, and so on. St. Lawrence appears to defend the village, joined by St. Sebastian and the angel who pledges to defend the inhabitants and causes the devils to be arrested and threatened with burning. According to Oscar Fernandez, "In a final sermon-like exhortation, the angel tells the villagers to be good, to avoid vices, to repudiate the devil, and to love their Creator; all sing to the defeat of Evil, as the devils are led out crying in their impotence and defeat." (18)

In the third act (which is in both Tupi and Castilian), the devils have been ordered to kill Decio and Valeriano. The two emperors appeal in vain to their Roman guards to save them from Hellfire. The fourth act opens with a speech in Portuguese by the angel, followed by "glosas" by Amor de Deus and Temor de

Deus rallying the people to love God who gave His only Son for the salvation of man. In the fifth and last act ten young Indian boys sing a stanza of a song in Tupi, "proclaiming confidence in St. Lawrence, repudiation of their vices, and their love for God as they perform a traditional dance for the feast of St. Lawrence." (19)

Sabato Magaldi, in commenting on the happy ending, says that "A santidade, a pureza e a retidão acabam por triunfar das tentações de Sátanas, covarde e impotente em face das emissórias divinas. Implanta-se a religião com fé inexorável." (20) In other words, it is a sermon acted out for all to see. Although Fernandez considers the classical references in the "auto" in line with traditional Iberian practice, he remarks that such references would certainly be over the heads of the Indian audience. This suggests to him that there was a broad range of audience in some Brazilian localities, and that at least some members of this audience were fairly well educated. (21)

However, it is to the natives that Anchieta makes his biggest appeal--the play is replete with references to jiboia, jaguar da caatinga, taguato, sucuri, andira-guacu, and all manner of Brazilian animals and birds. The language is natural, even earthy. In one memorable speech in Tupi, the angel is trying to flush Saravaia out of hiding; the Portuguese translation reads:

> Sai para fora, gamba!
> Arrebenta!
> Vamos, peste fedorenta!

- - - - - -

Borra que es, porco do mundo,
eu te meto no profundo...

In another speech Saravaia is protesting that he does not drink so much:

Oh! Não que me embebedei...
(minha sogra rabugenta
bebe mais do que julguei!)

Although the reader is held by the amusing, somewhat surrealistic image of the devil with a mother-in-law, the language flows naturally and simply, aimed at "corações ingenuas," (22) reinforcing the impression that Jose de Anchieta had mastered the concept of audience awareness long before it became a buzz-word in composition studies.

Notes

1. Moisés, Massaud. A Literatura Brasileira atraves dos Tempos. São Paulo: Editora Cultrix, 1981, p.32.
2. Ibid., p. 26.
3. Anchieta, José de. Informações, Fragmentos Históricos e Sermões do Padre Joseph de Anchieta, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1933, pp. 46-48.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.53.

6. Op. cit., p.46.
7. Jones, p.4.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p.6.
10. Ibid., p.11.
11. Wills, Garry. Under God: Religion in American Politics. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990, pp. 68-69.
12. Ibid., p.139.
13. Ibid.
14. Bosi, Alfredo. História Concisa da Litertura Brasileira. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1981, p.26.
15. Merquior, José Guilherme. De Anchieta a Euclides. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1977, p.9.
16. Preto-Rodas, Richard A. "Anchieta and Vieira: Drama as Sermon, Sermon as Drama." Luso-Brazilian Review, VII(2), December 1970, pp.96-103.
17. Anchieta, José de. Teatro de Anchieta, v.3. Sao Paulo: Edicoes Loyola, 1977, p.
18. Fernandez, Oscar. "Jose de Anchieta and Early Theatre Activity in Brazil," Luso-Brazilian Review, 15(1), Summer 1978, pp.26-43.
19. Ibid.
20. Magaldi, Sábato. Panorama do Teatro Brasileiro. São Paulo: Difusão Europeia do Livro, 1962, p.18.
21. Op. cit., p.
22. Castelo, Jose Aderaldo. Literatura Brasileira, Manifestação da Era Colonial